

Press release – International Women’s Day celebrated in plenary



Just before the opening of the session on Monday, Parliament marked 2021 International Women’s Day, focussing on women’s empowerment and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his opening speech, **EP President David Sassoli** stated: ‘‘The pandemic risks wiping out decades of achievements gained by European women’s struggle for the right to work, to share care work, for autonomy, for respect and for the right to make their own choices.’’ Regarding the gender pay gap, he added, ‘‘Women in Europe earn on average 14.1% less than men. This is not acceptable. The Commission’s proposal for binding pay transparency measures will be central to our work.’’ President Sassoli concluded by calling for all member states to ratify the Istanbul Convention, and for the EU to make violence against women a European-wide crime.

In a pre-recorded video message, the **Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern**, stressed that COVID-19 has exacerbated structural inequalities between women and men. ‘‘Only by fully – and meaningfully – including women in leadership at all levels can we ensure that our responses to the pandemic meet the needs of everyone’’, she said. ‘‘As we look towards the year ahead, we all know it will be tough. We, as leaders, will be tested, but we must resist the false promises in the face of those tests of protectionism and nationalism in our recovery from COVID-19. We must also do more to support

women-led business to be part of the recovery, so they can more readily experience the benefits of trade.’’

In her pre-recorded video message, the first female **Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris**, focussed on the many challenges facing women during the crisis. ‘‘We must ensure women’s safety at home and in every community. We must treat them with dignity at work and put in place the structures needed so that they can both care for their families and excel in the workforce. Finally, we must give women an equal voice in decision-making, for this is essential to free and fair democracies. This not just an act of goodwill; this is a show of strength. If we build a world that works for women, our nations will all be safer, stronger and more prosperous.’’

Kamala Harris also commented on the future of EU-US relations: ‘‘President Biden and I look forward to working with members of this Parliament in fortifying the transatlantic alliance.’’ Considering the many crises the world is facing, she added: ‘‘It is essential that we work together to advance those principles that strengthen democracies: accountability and transparency, the rule of law and humans rights. Let us not overlook the opportunities right in front of us to do that.’’

The celebration ended with a speech by **Commission President Ursula von der Leyen**, in the chamber. ‘‘Too many women in Europe lack the fundamental opportunity to work and earn a living. Today, the employment rate for women is 67%, while that of men is 78%. This is simply not acceptable. Last week, we set a new target for Europe: we must cut the gender employment gap by half, and by the end of this decade, 78% of all Europeans must have a job. It will not be easy but we will do everything in our power to reach this goal’’, she said. ‘‘The Commission required that all member states put women at the centre of their post-COVID-19 recovery plans. It will only be a true recovery if these plans are for all’’, she concluded.

To watch the individual statements, click on the links below:

[David Sassoli](#), President of the European Parliament

[Jacinda Ardern](#), Prime Minister of New Zealand

[Kamala Harris](#), Vice President of the United States

[Ursula von der Leyen](#), President of the European Commission